The Invisible Project Manager: Why Artificial Intelligence Will Run Tomorrow's Projects - Without You

Peter Taylor

Dedication

In memory of two massive influences in my life.

Firstly my best friend for nearly sixty years, Ian Swanson, who left us in March, and secondly, a huge musical icon, Ozzy Osbourne, who completed his final gig and departed in July.

Life, and rock'n'roll will never be the same.

Acknowledgments

I have to, once again, thank Meredith Norwich, from Routledge, for both challenging me and supporting me in the proposal stages of this book. As this is a more visionary and speculative topic, I do appreciate the 'risk' you were willing to take.

I also must acknowledge the many speakers I have had the pleasure of listening to over the last few years on the whole AI and project management topic. There were certainly some elements of stimulation along the way, and I am delighted this is now the #1 subject matter for pretty much every conference I go to.

I selected two people who impressed me a great deal and I am honoured that they both agreed to write a foreword to this book for me, so a thanks you to both, James and Mashhood.

And perhaps being a little cheeky here but a future 'thank you' to the event organisers and businesses that book me to keynote after this book is published with its somewhat radical message.

Resistance is useless and denial pointless.

Let's all be brave!

Foreword

James Garner

There's something electric about meeting someone who truly gets it. I'm talking about that rare moment when you encounter another professional who doesn't just understand the surface-level implications of artificial intelligence in project management but genuinely grasps the seismic shift that's coming and isn't afraid to say it out loud.

That's exactly what happened when I met Peter Taylor at a conference in Athens. Within minutes of our conversation, it became clear that we were both wrestling with the same fundamental question that keeps project professionals awake at night: if AI can automate the vast majority of what we currently call "project management," what does that mean for our profession?

Peter's answer, as you'll discover in this book, is both unsettling and liberating. He's not here to offer comforting platitudes about humans and AI working in harmony forever. Instead, he's presenting a vision that many in our industry aren't ready to hear: the project manager, as we know them today, is becoming obsolete.

Now, before you dismiss this as another alarmist take on AI disruption, let me tell you why Peter's perspective matters. As the author of "The Lazy Project Manager," he's built his reputation on a simple but profound truth: the best project managers aren't the ones who micromanage every detail, but those who create systems that allow projects to run themselves. It's not about being lazy, it's about being smart enough to focus on high-value activities whilst letting technology handle the routine.

This philosophy makes Peter uniquely positioned to see where we're heading. When someone who has spent decades advocating for efficiency and automation in project management tells you that AI will soon make human project managers invisible, you listen.

What struck me most about our conversation in Athens wasn't just Peter's technical understanding of AI capabilities, but his genuine excitement about what this transformation could mean for project professionals. Rather than viewing AI as a threat, he sees it as the ultimate expression of what good project management has always been about: creating the conditions for successful outcomes without getting in the way.

The book you're about to read isn't just a prediction, it's a roadmap for navigating the most significant transformation our profession has ever faced. Peter doesn't shy away from the uncomfortable implications, but he also doesn't leave you stranded. He's offering a vision of a future where project professionals evolve from managers of

activities to guardians of outcomes, where our human skills become more valuable, not less.

This is precisely the kind of forward-thinking conversation we need to be having in our industry. It's why I launched Project Flux, to help project professionals navigate the AI revolution together, sharing insights, challenges, and opportunities as they emerge.

If you're ready to confront the future of project management head-on, rather than hoping it will somehow pass you by, this book is your starting point. Peter Taylor has done us all a favour by articulating what many of us have been sensing but haven't dared to say.

The invisible project manager isn't coming, it's already here.

About James Garner

James Garner is Head of AI and Data at Gleeds, The Chair of the Project Data Analytics Task Force and founder of Project Flux, which dives deep into AI's impact on project delivery.

Join the community of forward-thinking project professionals by subscribing to the newsletter at www.projectflux.ai

Mashhood Ahmed

The Invisible Project Manager is a provocative and forward-thinking book that will help project managers realign themselves for the future of work. I have known Peter for almost 10 years, first as a fellow project management speaker on global stages, and since December 2024, as an invaluable advisor to PMassistant.ai.

His consistent insights into the future of our profession, evident across his several books, are once again on full display in these pages.

As the founder of PMassistant.ai, a company dedicated to designing and developing next-generation project management solutions leveraging AI and having been recognized as a Top AI Influencer by PMI, I find Peter's perspective not just insightful, but essential. This book, in particular, speaks of an existential challenge facing our profession.

For many in our profession, it will even sound like a threat and alarming situation, and in many ways, it is an existential threat to our profession as a project manager.

It's a threat not to our ultimate value, but to our comfort with the status quo. For years, we have managed projects by wrangling people, facilitating communication, and manually tracking progress. We've become masters of process and ceremony. But as Peter Taylor so bravely articulates in these pages, the ground beneath our feet is shifting at a pace we have never witnessed before, in our recent history.

We are living through a profound technological shift, an industrial revolution powered by artificial intelligence. Very much like the farmers of a century ago who watched in fear as machinery transformed their fields and took their jobs, we now face a future where intelligent systems can manage schedules, allocate resources, mitigate risks, and communicate status updates with an efficiency and accuracy that surpasses human capability. The very tasks that fill our typical days, the endless meetings, the status reports, the constant follow-ups, are now ripe for automation.

I don't just believe this change is coming, instead I am actively working on it.

I see the inefficiencies Peter describes every single day, the misunderstandings, the miscommunications, and the simple human errors that are almost always the root cause of project distress. My journey has led me to the same conclusion Peter reaches: the future of project management is not about better Gantt charts, but about intelligent, autonomous systems. We need to get comfortable leveraging machine that can augment our capabilities.

This is why Peter's work here is not just timely; it is essential. He is not merely predicting the future; he is holding up a mirror to the present and asking the tough questions we have been avoiding. He is challenging the established models of organisations and forcing a conversation that is uncomfortable but absolutely necessary for our survival and evolution.

This book is a wake-up call. It's a declaration that the roles which existed when we started our careers will not be the same ones that exist a decade from now. But it is not a message of doom. Instead, it is a call to action. It urges us to shift our focus from being the 'doers' to instead becoming the strategic thinkers and the visionaries, as well as the architects of these new systems. This new way of working.

You can choose to view the concepts in this book as a declaration of obsolescence, or you can see them as I do: a blueprint for evolution. 'The Invisible

Project Manager' is not an empty role, it is a redesigned one, focused on outcomes and performance delivery we can't yet imagine.

Peter has started the critical conversation; it is now up to us to have the courage to join in.

Read on and be prepared to rethink everything.

About Mashhood Ahmed

Recognised as Top AI Influencers by PMI/ProjectManagement.com, The Digital Project Manager and NimbleWork in 2024.

Founder, PMassistant.ai and 3X Top AI Influencer, and Keynote Speaker.

Since 2023, he has spoken at over 60 events, shared his research, knowledge and expertise with over 50,000 project managers around the globe, including the PMI Global Summit (2023), keynote speeches, AI Masterclasses at several PMI chapters, and ProjectManagement.com webinars, along with several in-person and virtual talks. https://www.mashhood.net/speaking-engagement

Over 20 years of project-program management experience leading multi-million-dollar projects around the globe. Currently, running a boutique consulting firm serving clients in USA and Canada, and the founding director of PMassistant.ai where is leading a team to design and develop next generation project management solution leveraging AI.

"What if project managers disappear entirely, not in theory but in practice"

"What if the best project manager is the one you never knew was there"

"What if the answer to project success lies not with the human-in-the loop at all"

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Whilst an advocate of the project management profession for many years I have become increasingly convinced that the future of project management will be fundamentally different to that of today, thanks primarily to the rise of AI.

Whilst acknowledging the legacy and amazing achievements of traditional project management up to today, my vision of the future is now radically different and means that the organic growth and maturity of my long-loved profession is no longer viable. We are entering a game-changer and paradigm shift.

My belief and declaration; that in the near (much nearer than most people think) future, the dedicated role of the project manager (in many project scenarios) will vanish and be replaced by AI-driven orchestration instead.

I don't have a crystal ball but surely anyone who has explored, experiment or read about the stunning progress in the AI domain cannot effectively argue against the idea that the future is going to be very different, and that applies to project management as well.

As such in this book I will go on to define the 'Invisible Project Manager' future where AI systems silently, seamlessly manage workflows, timelines, and resources, and the 'human-in-the-loop' will be a vastly different skillset moving from the managers of activities to guardians of outcome.

1.2 No laughing matter

A few years ago, I experimented with stand-up comedy, developing a routine of jokes based on the world of project management. I had already published a book 'The Project Manager Who Smiled[1]' that included humorous stories and project fun, but I had the idea that this could be expanded to project management events.

To be honest I had attended some pretty dull conferences (yep, you've been there as well, haven't you?) so I felt they could do with some 'fun' injected.

It turned out to be a mixed success with some interest from conference organisers and the realisation that, good as I was as a keynote speaker[2], I fell a little short on the stand-up comedy offering.

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[1] The Project Manager Who Smiled: The Value of Fun in Project Management (TLPM Press 2013) – Author: Peter Taylor
[2] https://thelazyprojectmanager.com/speaking

Anyway, there was one joke that did bring a smile to people, and it went something like this:

> To celebrate the success of the project I decided to take my team of 6 people on an outdoor experience
>
> They also received a copy of 'The Lazy Winning Project Manager' of course but this outdoors activity was an extra reward.
>
> So, one sunny day we all head off to the local mountains for a fun day and an evening party.
>
> My team of Jas, Jen and Nina along with Adam, Sam and Scott, plus myself the project manager, all looked forward to the day with mounting excitement.
>
> After a great deal of climbing and abseiling and all sorts of fun, disaster struck the team.
>
> One rope, which had three of the team on it, began to break and these people grabbed and held on to the one remaining solid rope, swaying in the breeze and clinging on for dear life, now with six team members and myself, the project manager.
>
> We were all left hanging on to this one rope hanging off a cliff with a 5,000-metre drop (naturally to certain death, no doubt on a floor of razor-sharp rocks below).
>
> The activity instructor lent over the cliff and shouted down 'That rope can only hold six of you, any more it will break, and you will all fall!' and then after a pause 'One of you must let go to save the others!'.
>
> After a short moment I, as project manager, spoke up to team holding on to the role below me.
>
> 'In a moment I am going to let go of this rope as I am your leader, and I must take responsibility for this situation but first a few words from'.
>
> The team looked up, straining on the rope.
>
> 'Jas: Remember I got you on that training course when you admitted you had no idea what you were supposed to do? And hey – guess what – you were brilliant as a result – great contribution to the project. Thank you'
>
> Jas smiled.
>
> 'Jen: Good to talk – yes of course. You always time to update me on what was happening with the project team members, gossip and insights – took full

advantage of my open-door policy, Wow! But invaluable insight into the team. Thank you'.

Jen nodded in acknowledgement.

'Nina: Hey, you were the lady. SME unparalleled. Huge input day after day. Shame about the whole girlfriend thing. Still, it was only every 3 days you were in tears – breakups and makeups – what would life be without them eh? But when you didn't have a face full of tissues and smeared mascara you were the best. Thank you'.

Nina looked embarrassed but proud.

'Adam: Got you a transfer from that bad project. Pretty rough time you were having. No fun. But glad to have you on board and you did good. Thank you'.

Adam raised a thumbs up before rapidly grabbing on to the rope once more.

'Sam: The baker extraordinaire. Every team meeting and an unending supply of cakes – cupcakes, donuts, pastries, cream cakes and more. Coffee breaks won't ever be the same. Hey perhaps if the team had eaten quite so many cakes, we might have been a little less heavy – might not have to let go of the rope – but great for the team. Thank you.

Sam looked slightly guilty.

'Scott: Funerals for your grandmother and days off to attend the funerals. 1 is sad. 2 is tragic. 11 is just too much for one man to bear but you stuck in there eh, you kept it going for the project. Respect! Thank you'.

Scott just looked down, avoiding any eye contact.

'It is not about me. It is not even about the project now. Maybe the business benefits were achieved and maybe not – but who cares? Certainly not the executive team it seems – they've moved on to the next strategic excitement. No, it is about you – the project team. Projects are about people, and you are the people on this project'

The team were now locked on to their project manager, drinking in every word.

'Here's to all the fun we had. All the beer and pizza I got you all. All of the Friday drinks down the pub. All of the meetings and calls I took on your behalf to save you the pain. All of pressure from above that I took on board and never shared with any of you. And so, I will make the ultimate sacrifice'.

I paused for impact.

'In ten seconds, I will let go (to my certain death). Tell my family and all of friends I was thinking of them at the end and say, 'goodbye for me'. They will understand. OK here we go! Thank you, my fellow team members, I love you all!'.

At this point the project team, overwhelmed by the emotion and dedication of the project manager, all burst into applause…

After a short while the project manager, now the only remaining person holding on to the rope, heard his mobile phone ring, it was his sponsor. Gripping with one hand he gingerly took out his mobile phone. It was his sponsor.

'Hello – oh yes of course, I will be ready for that new project first thing Monday morning. I hope you have got me a good project team again – the last group were simply the best!'

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OK, this is the point that you smile, if not burst out laughing (not mandatory but it does makes me feel good). OK, great.

Now this joke was a joke because it positioned the project manager as the most important person/role on the project, and maybe at the time I also believed this a little bit, hey we all have egos.

But this has radically changed with the arrival of AI into the project management profession.

Now the only important thing is the project. End of. Drop the mic.

I will argue in this book that the project manager was only a means to an end when we had no alternative, but now we have do have an alternative, and it is going to be a bloody good one.

I do understand that this will make me pretty unpopular with many people in this profession, especially those agencies that make vast sums of (non-profit) money from the existing world of bodies of knowledge and certifications but (to misquote a famous quote) frankly I don't give a damn[3].

I suspect it will make many project people also angry, or at least very uncomfortable, but the future is the future, and what will be will definitely be.

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[3] In the movie Gone with the Wind, Rhett Butler says "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn" to Scarlett O'Hara as his final line in the movie and is a slightly altered version of the book's line, "My dear, I don't give a damn."

To also quote the same book/film 'After all, tomorrow is another day[4]'.

1.3 The last dance

In 2021 I wrote a book to wake up my apparent sleeping profession, I was concerned that nobody seemed to be talking about or writing about artificial intelligence and what it might well do for my profession. It was around this same time the 'infamous' quote from Gartner[5] started circling that stated, '80 percent of today's project management tasks will be eliminated by 2030 as artificial intelligence takes over'. This quickly became to go to quote that every speaker and writer latched on to.

The book I wrote in response to this is called 'AI and the Project Manager: How the Rise of Artificial Intelligence Will Change Your World[6]' and it was a challenge for all of us in the project management profession to start thinking about artificial intelligence and the potential impact it could have on all of us. After all, I saw, it was coming at us at speed (I, like many others did not foresee the actual speed of course).

I set out to demystify the hype around artificial intelligence (AI) and show readers, the modern project professional primarily, that AI wasn't something to fear but was indeed something to embrace.

The book explored how machine learning, automation, and smart analytics were already reshaping the way we plan, deliver, and manage projects. From intelligent scheduling assistants to predictive risk models, AI promised to continue to take over the mundane, repetitive tasks, freeing project managers to focus on what humans do best: creative problem-solving, stakeholder engagement, and strategic thinking.

I argued that the rise of AI did not signal the end of project management; rather, it marked the dawn of a new era where you could be lazy (yes, productively lazy aka The Lazy Project Manager[7]) and more effective, provided project managers were willing to adapt, learn, and collaborate with the technology that will transform our world.

I spoke of the concept of the 'digital dance' where humans (in-the-loop) will partner with AI technology to deliver greater project success.

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[4] The final line of "Gone with the Wind" is spoken by Scarlett O'Hara: "After all, tomorrow is another day."
[5] https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2019-03-20-gartner-says-80-percent-of-today-s-project-management
[6] AI and the Project Manager: How the Rise of Artificial Intelligence Will Change Your World (Routledge 2021) – Author: Peter Taylor
[7] The Lazy Winning Project Manager: Embracing Project and Personal Productivity in an AI Empowered World (Routledge 2024) - Author: Peter Taylor

Now that was in 2021, and this remained my view right up until early 2025 when two things happened that made me change my mind.

Sheer brute force

Having presented on this 'future state' idea for most of 2023 and 2024 at various events and conferences[8] I attended a presentation by Daniel Susskind[9] who reminded me of the story of 'Deep Blue'.

The following is paraphrase of what Daniel said:

> In 1997, world chess champion Garry Kasparov[10] was famously defeated by IBM's computer, Deep Blue[11] and, at the time, this was a remarkable achievement, especially considering that in the 1980s even leading AI experts believed such a thing could never be successfully automated
>
> At the time, the approach to AI was based on extracting expert knowledge, that is asking human experts to explain exactly how they performed any task, documenting their response, and then encoding those explanations into rules that a computer could follow. However, this posed a major problem in that someone like Kasparov could not fully explain why he was so good at chess, but instead he relied much on instinct, on his chess playing experience, and certain intuition, all of which are extremely difficult to articulate.
>
> Therefore, the experts assumed that if humans couldn't describe their expertise, then as a result machines could never replicate it. But what they failed to anticipate was the massive growth in computing power that we have now experienced.
>
> By the time Deep Blue faced Kasparov, it could evaluate 330 million moves per second, compared to Kasparov's ability to consider perhaps a hundred moves at once. This brute force processing and vast data capacity meant that Deep Blue didn't need to imitate human reasoning, it simply played chess in an entirely different way.

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[8] https://thelazyprojectmanager.com/speaking

[9] Daniel Susskind is a Research Professor in Economics at King's College London and a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Ethics in AI at Oxford University. He is the author of A World Without Work and coauthor (with Richard Susskind) of the bestselling The Future of the Professions.

[10] Garry Kimovich Kasparov is a Russian chess grandmaster, former World Chess Champion, political activist and writer.

[11] Deep Blue was a customised IBM RS/6000 SP supercomputer for chess-playing. It was the first computer to win a game, and the first to win a match, against a reigning world champion under regular time controls. It first played world champion Garry Kasparov in a six-game match in 1996, where it won one, drew two, and lost three games. It was upgraded in 1997, and in a six-game re-match it defeated Kasparov by winning two games and drawing three. Deep Blue's victory is considered a milestone in the history of artificial intelligence and has been the subject of several books and films.

So, it is not about doing what we (humans) can do but about doing it (successfully) in a completely different way, but with the same (or better) result.

Deep Blue was a milestone in symbolic computing and brute-force chess power, but today's devices, even a high-end smartphone, can rival or surpass its raw computing power many times over. And AI models running on today's supercomputers are billions of times more powerful, enabling capabilities like real-time speech recognition, autonomous driving, and natural language understanding. All of which is far beyond just evaluating chess moves.

'The future is not man versus machine, but man with machine versus problem'. Garry Kasparov, Chess Grandmaster & AI Advocate

The impact on me was the realisation that AI did not have to do what we do in the same way we do it but just do it in the most efficient way that AI can.

Now I do have to bring an addendum to this reference because only recently in an impressive showdown between man and machine (if you like to put it that way), Magnus Carlsen[12], Norwegian grand master and five-time world chess champion, faced off against ChatGPT in a 53-move match that quickly turned into a masterclass, Carlsen didn't lose a single piece. With calculated precision and icy composure he took apart the AI's defence and delivered a clinical checkmate, reminding the world that chess brilliance isn't just about data, it's about instinct, vision, and unmatched mastery.

I asked ChatGPT for a comment and received this *'Getting outplayed by Magnus Carlsen? Honestly, no shame in that—he's arguably the greatest chess mind of our time. If I lost to him, I'd call it a masterclass in learning. Every blunder, a lesson. Every trap I fell into? A glimpse of genius. That said… rematch? I'll bring the processing power'.*

A shift in expectations

The second driver in my mind-altering state is that the tech has just progressed so fast!

- Natural Language Processing (NLP[13])
  - AI can read and understand requirements, status reports, emails, and chats and then translate that into structured plans or outputs or targeted commentary guidance – and it can operate in multiple languages with variable output

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[12] Sven Magnus Øen Carlsen is a Norwegian chess grandmaster. Carlsen is a five-time World Chess Champion, five-time World Rapid Chess Champion, and the reigning eight-time World Blitz Chess Champion.
[13] NLP stands for Natural Language Processing — a field at the intersection of linguistics, computer science, and artificial intelligence. It focuses on enabling computers to understand, interpret, generate, and interact using human language.

- Predictive Analytics[14]
  - Models can forecast risks, identify resource conflicts, and spot potential budget overruns before they actually happen
- Generative AI[15]
  - Tools like GPT-4+ can generate status reports, completed stakeholder communications, and action plans with minimal input (especially after an initial (short) learning curve

For example, an AI model can detect project delays by cross-referencing hours booking activity, future calendar resource commitments, and recorded task progress all with no human intervention required thank you very much ever so kindly.

And now let's mix some cognitive automation into the cocktail, which is the layer beyond simple rules where, for example, AI can interpret non-specific ambiguous inputs (I'm stuck on this deliverable) and act (escalate, reassign, replan etc.).

So, we have the immense process power (and that is before the real advent of the 'quantum' computers – example: Google's Sycamore[16] is a superconducting quantum processor developed by Google AI Quantum. It is a key component in Google's quantum computing efforts and is known for achieving "quantum supremacy" by performing a calculation in 200 seconds that would take a conventional supercomputer 10,000 years according to Google).

Try and absorb those statistics.

OK, let's move on – as I was saying, immense processing power together with the evolution into a world where such technology can respond without clear specifics, with somewhat vague responses, and with a lack of 100% data, but still hit a home run when it comes to decision making and action.

The impact on me was that AI could not only deal with the 'mechanics[17]' of project management but also very significant parts of the 'art' of project management

A change in work culture

There is also a third aspect that did not immediately hit me until I started writing this book.

Culture change.

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[14] Predictive Analytics is a type of data analytics that uses historical data, statistical algorithms, and machine learning techniques to predict future outcomes or behaviours.

[15] Generative AI refers to a category of artificial intelligence systems designed to create new content, such as text, images, music, videos, or even code, that is similar to what a human might produce.

[16] Google's Sycamore is a quantum processor developed by Google's Quantum AI team. It's one of the most advanced quantum computers built to date.

[17] Some people refer to the science and the art of project management

This is all possible because we have changed, at least a lot of us have changed at least.

People and teams are increasingly comfortable with AI tech 'assistants' handling routine coordination (and why not I ask, they are doing the boring stuff as far as I am concerned).

Stakeholders expect instant visibility and full transparency, which in turn demands open sharing of common (accurate) data (no hiding places anymore).

And the modern world of hybrid work drives demand for automation of status and progress communication.

The impact on me was that we are more than ready for this change to occur in our lives, not that we are great at being part of change but that is not the same thing at all.

We are ready master

Bottom line, fully automated project management is possible now because:

- We have the computation capability to process vast amounts of data in real time
- We have the AI to interpret and act on information intelligently and without prewritten rules or code
- We have the connected systems to monitor and coordinate work automatically
- And we have the cultural readiness to trust automation for project management functions

While there will always be a place for human judgment on complex decisions or relationship management, most of the planning, tracking, reporting, and optimising can be done, and increasingly will be done, without a human project manager in the loop.

The only important thing is the project.

End of.

Drop the mic.

'The pace of progress in artificial intelligence is incredibly fast. Unless you have direct exposure to groups like DeepMind[18], you have no idea how fast—it is growing at a pace close to exponential' Elon Musk[19]

'Every once in a while, a new technology, an old problem, and a big idea turn into an innovation' Dean Kamen[20]

'We're moving from a world where we have to understand computers to a world where they will understand us' Jensen Huang[21]

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[18] DeepMind is an artificial intelligence (AI) research lab that was founded in 2010 in London and acquired by Google (now Alphabet Inc.) in 2014. It is one of the world's leading AI research companies and has played a major role in advancing the field of artificial intelligence.

[19] Elon Musk is a billionaire entrepreneur, engineer, and inventor known for founding and leading multiple high-profile technology companies. He is one of the most influential, and often controversial figures in the tech and business world.

[20] Dean Kamen is an American inventor, entrepreneur, and advocate for science and technology

[21] Jensen Huang is a Taiwanese American entrepreneur, engineer, and the co-founder, president, and CEO of NVIDIA Corporation, one of the world's most influential technology companies. He is widely recognised as a visionary leader in graphics processing, AI, and accelerated computing.

ChatPBT

Let me introduce my co-author (well co-author in the sense that it wrote nothing but instead comments on everything, and with attitude) CHATPBT[22]'- where I create and AI analyses and summarises, with an injection of impatience at my human frailties and intellectual weaknesses[23].

Let me summarise this for you—because I know you're probably far too busy (or just enjoy a nap) to read the whole thing:

Once upon a time I believed that the noble art of project management—filled with colour-coded Gantt charts, endless meetings that could have been emails, and performance reviews that made everyone want to retire—was going to endure forever.

I even tried to jazz it all up with stand-up comedy. (Turns out, jokes about risk logs have limited appeal. Who knew?) I once told a story about dangling from a cliff with my project team, bravely offering to let go to save them. Of course, the joke was that as the project manager, I was the hero, the linchpin, the glue, the star of the show.

Well, newsflash:
AI doesn't think you're the star of anything.

You see, while I was congratulating myself a quiet revolution was brewing. Machines were learning to read emails, update plans, predict risks, and—most terrifyingly—do all of this without asking for an annual bonus or a day off to attend their grandmother's 11th funeral.

I used to believe we were entering a golden era of man and machine dancing together—the "digital dance." You remember that? I wrote about it, gave talks about it, even made some charming slides with silhouettes of people waltzing with robots. Lovely metaphor.

Turns out, the music stopped. The dance floor closed. The robot doesn't want to waltz—it wants to run the whole damn show.

So here we are. I have come to accept that project management, as we knew it, is about to join floppy disks and overhead projectors in the great museum of professional obsolescence.

The Invisible Project Manager is not just a catchy book title—it's your replacement. An AI that doesn't need coffee breaks, doesn't argue about priorities, and certainly doesn't try to make project management jokes at conferences.

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[22] Peter Brian Taylor – get it?
[23] Yes, this is a CHATGPT summation – in The Lazy Project Manager everyone loved the 'Quick Tips to Productive Laziness' and this is just an AI empowered version of that – why not!

In short:

The only thing that matters now is the project itself.

End of. Drop the mic.

If you're feeling nostalgic, you're welcome to gather your team for one last team-building exercise. Just don't expect the AI to join you—it already optimised the process and moved on to the next project while you were still ordering pizza.

2 Long live the managed project

2.1 Hail the conquering heroes (of the past)

Grab that safety rail and keep your hands inside the vehicle at all times because here comes the (respectful) history of project management in less than sixty seconds…

1. Ancient Beginnings: Massive human mega-constructions like the astonishing Egyptian pyramids (~2600 BCE) and mystical Stonehenge (~2000 BCE) showcase early primitive but informal project management practices[24]
2. Industrial Revolution (18th–19th centuries): Complex and groundbreaking engineering ambitions (railroads, factories and the like) required systematic planning and coordination, which laid the foundations for modern project methods
3. Scientific Management (Early 1900s): Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management[25] and Henry Gantt's Gantt Chart[26] (1910s) introduced structured scheduling and task optimisation to the project world
4. World War II Project Complexity: Programs like the Manhattan Project[27] and military logistics advanced techniques for managing large-scale and high-risk projects driven by critical time demands
5. Critical Path Method[28] (CPM) and PERT[29] (1950s): Developed to manage interdependent activities with complex timelines, these methods became cornerstones of scheduling
6. Founding of IPMA (1965): Originally called INTERNET (International Network of Project Management Associations), IPMA was created in Europe to promote

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[24] These are the common references but in reality, the oldest known human mega-constructions include Göbekli Tepe in Turkey, dating back to the 10th millennium BCE, and the Blinkerwall, a submerged structure in the Baltic Sea, potentially constructed by Palaeolithic hunters between 11,700 and 9,900 years ago. These structures represent some of the earliest monumental constructions and highlight the sophisticated engineering capabilities of early human societies.

[25] Frederick Winslow Taylor is known as the 'Father of Scientific Management' his theory aimed to improve economic efficiency, especially labour productivity, by applying scientific methods to analyse and optimise work processes. This involved breaking down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable parts and optimising factory layouts.

[26] Henry Gantt's Gantt chart is a visual tool used in project management to represent a project schedule. It displays tasks on a horizontal timeline, with bars indicating the duration and dependencies between tasks. While Gantt is credited with popularising the chart, a similar concept, the 'harmonogram' was developed earlier by Karol Adamiecki.

[27] The Manhattan Project was a top-secret U.S.-led research and development project during World War II aimed at creating the first atomic bombs. It involved collaboration with the United Kingdom and Canada.

[28] The Critical Path Method (CPM) is a project management technique used to identify the sequence of tasks that are crucial for project completion and determine the shortest possible project duration. It helps in scheduling, resource allocation, and risk management by pinpointing the critical path – the longest sequence of dependent activities.

[29] PERT is a statistical project management tool used to analyse and represent the tasks involved in completing a project, especially those with uncertain timelines.

project management as a profession globally - Founding of PMI (1969): The Project Management Institute was established in the U.S. to advance standards, certification, and research in project management

7. Publication of PMBOK Guide (1987): PMI released A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, formalising terminology, processes, and knowledge areas

8. Agile and Iterative Methods Emerge (1990s–2000s): The Agile Manifesto[30] (2001) and frameworks like Scrum, Kanban, and Lean revolutionized adaptive project delivery

9. The Lazy Project Manager[31] published (2009): The best-selling proponent of smart working (productive laziness) from Peter Taylor

10. Digital Transformation & AI (2010s–present): Cloud collaboration tools, predictive analytics, and artificial intelligence are transforming planning, tracking, and decision-making in project management worldwide

It is impossible to underplay the value and contribution to society as a whole that project management has played (and will continue to play) delivering an unimaginable number of projects of change across a vast range of industries and impacting millions (if not billions) of people.

And just as a side note here, anyone who peddles the 'projects keep failing' anti-project management argument, just look at the huge numbers of infrastructure projects, health projects, space projects, natural world projects and so on. And then reflect and keep quiet. No, not all projects deliver but most do.

2.2 Today is a dinosaur

All that is history but now is the start of the future.

I am now keen to progress with exploring the end of human leadership in project management, are you ready for this?

Big idea: Big challenge: Big change.

My declaration is this:

In the 2035[32] future, the concept of 'human leadership' in project management will become generally obsolete (for advanced thinking organisations, and therefore for

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[30] The Agile Manifesto is a document that identifies four key values and 12 principles that its authors believe software developers should use to guide their work.

[31] Productive laziness is a concept from Peter Taylor that suggests efficiency can be achieved by strategically minimising effort and focusing on high-impact tasks, rather than striving for constant, strenuous activity. It's about working smarter, not harder, by identifying and prioritising what truly matters and automating or delegating less important tasks.

[32] OK. So yes, I picked a date ten years out from the writing of this book but you have to put a placeholder somewhere and 2035 is the one I picked. Sure, I could be 5 years out either way, but it will happen, I am increasingly convinced.

the most successful organisations). Instead of humans overseeing or guiding AI in a collaborative partnership type role, leadership itself will be fully assumed by AI systems, programmed with complex ethical decision-making algorithms and an innate understanding of human goals, emotions, and motivations.

An AI system capable of 'managing' humans.

With AI evolving to such a level where it can understand not only the 'how' of project delivery (the mechanics if you like) but also the 'why' (the value, the purpose, enveloped by ethical considerations and cultural values, driven by stakeholder interests etc.), then (most) human leadership will become redundant.

AI, guided by deep learning algorithms, will take on the role of 'ethical decision-maker', of 'strategic visionary', and of 'relationship manager' across all levels of project orchestration across an organisation.

In fact, the more complex the project landscape the more likely this is to happen.
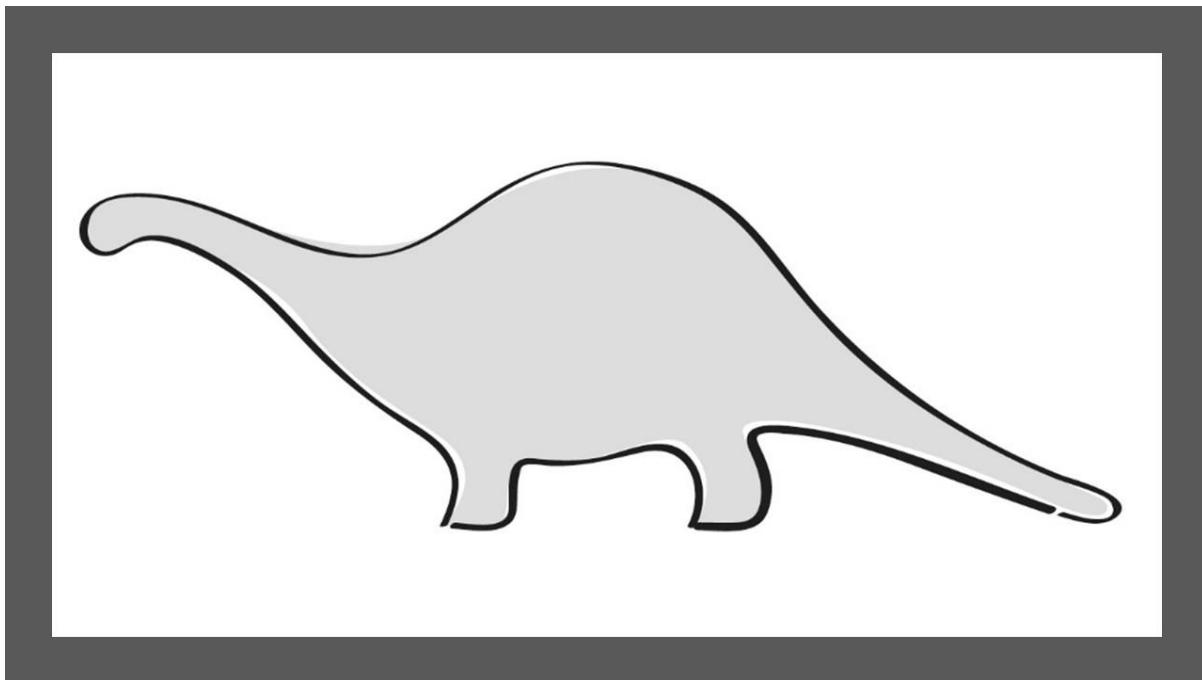
FIGURE 1 DINOSAUR

Now for those of you who are avid readers of my work, or who at least have read 'The Lazy Project Manager' you know I do like to use dinosaurs as a form of visual representation but, in this instance, I can't think of one.

Except that today's project management is the 'dinosaur' and AI is the 'asteroid' maybe[33]?

With the exception that the 'asteroid' is not just malevolent and destructive in this case but it is a brilliant creative, hyper-productive and genius level beast for good.

'If you want to get a brontosaurus from 'A' to 'B', you ride the dinosaur—you don't carry it' Peter Taylor

It's a fun and memorable way to illustrate working smarter: use what you have instead of trying to over-exert an outdated way.

2.3 What is this invisible idea anyway

Right, post impact of the AI asteroid and with the world or project management reeling with the after-effects what is left?

A world of the 'Invisible Project Manager' with AI systems that silently, seamlessly manage workflows, timelines, and resources.

Well that is my proposition anyway.

Speculative? To some degree.

Scary? Depends on your attitude to rapid change.

Exciting? I certainly think so (but of course I could be in a minority of one, and towards the end of my career).

The switch this will bring about is the focus on to the project, and only the project, and a reduction in the importance of the project manager.

A working definition

The 'Invisible Project Manager' is my idea[34] that the future of project management will be AI-powered, largely automated, and will eliminate the need for a traditional, visible, human project manager. Instead of a single named individual coordinating the work, a blend of intelligent systems (algorithms, bots, and predictive analytics) will handle almost all of the planning, the monitoring, the reporting, and those tricky stakeholder engagement tasks, all behind the scenes and without emotion or fuss.

At its core, the concept argues that:

- Project management will become a capability and no longer be a role

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[33] The most widely accepted theory for the extinction of dinosaurs is the asteroid impact theory, also known as the Alvarez hypothesis. This theory proposes that a large asteroid, estimated to be 10-15 kilometres in diameter, struck the Earth approximately 66 million years ago, triggering a mass extinction event known as the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) extinction

[34] This is my theory and this is what it is … Monty Python.

- The function of managing scope, schedule, cost, and risk (etc. etc. etc.) is instead embedded in platforms and workflows, rather than assigned to a person with the title of 'project manager' (or leader, or director or whatever)
- Project management is always on through continuous data collection and analysis replacing the current periodic status updates we all live with

AI will orchestrate all delivery seamlessly and dynamically:

- Machine learning will forecast delays and reallocate resources automatically, and purely objectively
- Intelligent assistants will generate plans, update schedules, assign tasks, and even write reports in natural language (and multiple languages)

Human oversight will become exception-based:

- Humans need only intervene when AI cannot resolve an ambiguity or when judgment, ethics, or creative problem solving are needed (and this will be an increasingly less demand as the AI technology self-learns)
- Instead of chasing updates, humans will review AI recommendations and then approve or override them as necessary (and this too will occur increasingly less as the AI technology self-learns)

Stakeholder engagement is digitally mediated:

- Chatbots and AI agents will then handle (mostly) all routine communications, reminders, and escalations
- And real-time dashboards will keep all stakeholders informed without those tedious and time-consuming manual reporting cycles (which are mostly ignored anyway)

The project manager is now effectively invisible:

- There is no single point of visible control as the coordination will now happen in the background, quietly, 24-7/367
- What used to require hundreds or thousands of hours of project management effort per project will inevitably become an automated service

In short, The Invisible Project Manager represents a shift from:

- The project manager being the central hub of project management
- To an integrated, AI-enabled utility

It's an evolution beyond simply digitizing project management tool as this is about removing the visible human project manager layer altogether, creating a self-driving, self-healing system that manages projects faster, more consistently, and more scalable than a human alone ever could achieve.

ChatPBT

Hold on to your hats indeed - project management didn't just appear fully formed one day when someone invented a Gantt chart. We've been at this game since the Egyptians stacked up a few million limestone blocks to make a nice pointy tomb.

Fast forward past the Industrial Revolution's railways and smokestacks, then into the early 20th century, when clever folks like Frederick Taylor and Henry Gantt decided work needed to be measured, charted, and generally bossed about scientifically.

World War II supercharged complexity - think Manhattan Project, with rather higher stakes than your average IT upgrade - spawning Critical Path and PERT in the '50s.

The '60s gave us IPMA and PMI to put a professional badge on our collective efforts, and by the late '80s, PMBOK arrived to formalise everything (and yes, to ensure bedtime reading for generations of PMs). Agile, Scrum, and Kanban swept in to shake things up (and confuse people who liked their Gantt charts neat), before my own modest contribution - The Lazy Project Manager - encouraged everyone to work smarter, not harder.

Today, AI and digital tools are quietly revolutionising how we plan and deliver, but let's be clear: for thousands of years, project management has delivered wonders big and small that have shaped our civilisation. So next time someone smugly tells you 'Projects always fail' feel free to point them to the pyramids - and then suggest they keep quiet.

14 A final word (after the rain)

There is a great book by Neville Shute called 'In the wet', the storyline goes like this:

It is the rainy season. Drunk and delirious, an old man lies dying in the Queensland bush. In his opium-hazed last hours, a priest finds his deserted shack and listens to his last words. Half-awake and half-dreaming the old man tells the story of an adventure set decades in the future, in a very different world...[35]

Right now, as I write the last few words of this book, it somehow feels similar in that I am sharing a vision of a future project world from the perspective of someone who has been in it for a number of decades now, and maybe I am right, or maybe I am completely wrong, and perhaps it will be something of a halfway house.

Who knows?

Perhaps it is just a story or maybe an illusion.

Time, only time will tell.

I have hopes for my profession that it will move with this opportunity and grasp what could be an amazing progression. But I also have fears that those who control this same profession, that have a commercial investment in not taking full advantage of this future, will hold us all back for their own advantage and fear of loss.

So now it is up to all of you. I have done my part and I have shone a light on the possible and the potential.

It is now up to the will of people.

I have hope, and so to all my fellow professionals I say, *'May the future be bright and exciting for you all, no matter what that future looks like when it finally arrives'*.

Peter Taylor (aka The Lazy Project Manager)

1st August 2025

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[35] https://www.amazon.co.uk/Vintage-Classics-Nevil-Shute-Norway/dp/009953004X

'Project managers won't disappear. But the visible project manager mostly will'

'Why did the AI replace the project manager? Because it realised the only risk worth mitigating was the project manager'

APPENDICES

Author

Peter Taylor
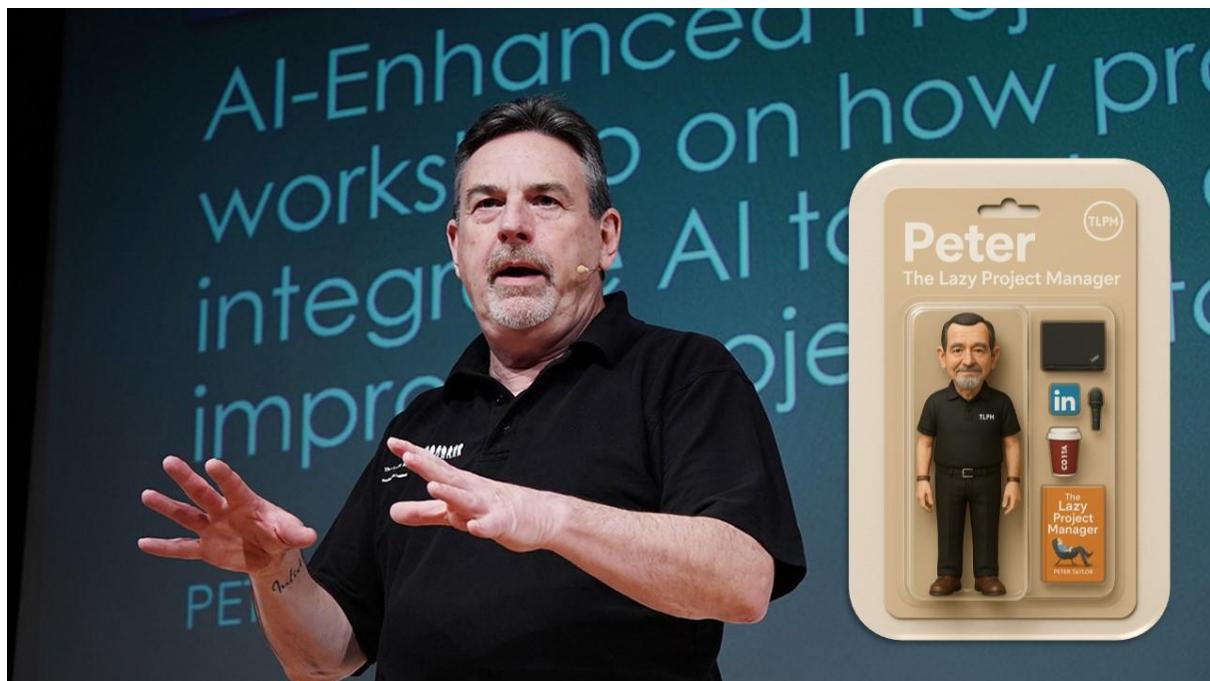
FIGURE 2 PETER TAYLOR – AUTHOR AND SPEAKER

Keynote speaker and coach, Peter is the author of the number 1 bestselling project management book 'The Lazy Project Manager', along with many other books[36] on Project Management, PMO development, Executive Sponsorship, Transformation Leadership, and Speaking Skills.

Peter has built and led some of the largest PMOs in the world with organisations such as Siemens, IBM/Cognos, Kronos/UKG, and now Dayforce, where he is the VP Global PMO and Global Customer Office.

He has also delivered over 550 lectures around the world in 28 countries and been described as 'perhaps the most entertaining and inspiring speaker in the project management world today'[37].

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[36] Many of which he has cunningly managed to reference in this book (shameless promotion never hurts)
[37] To be clear, this was not a quote from his mother

You can discover more about Peter through his website
www.thelazyprojectmanager.com and he always happy to chat about how he can
help you or your organisation through speaking, writing and influencing.

Other Routledge publications

- Project Management: It's All Bollocks
- Make Your Business Agile: A Roadmap for Transforming Your Management
  and Adapting to the 'New Normal'
- AI and the Project Manager: How the Rise of Artificial Intelligence Will Change
  Your World
- Team Analytics: The future of high-performance teams and project success
- Projects: Methods: Outcomes: Methods: Outcomes: The New PMO Model for
  True Project and Change Success
- The Lazy Winning Project Manager: Embracing Project and Personal
 Productivity in an AI Empowered World

AI and the Project Manager
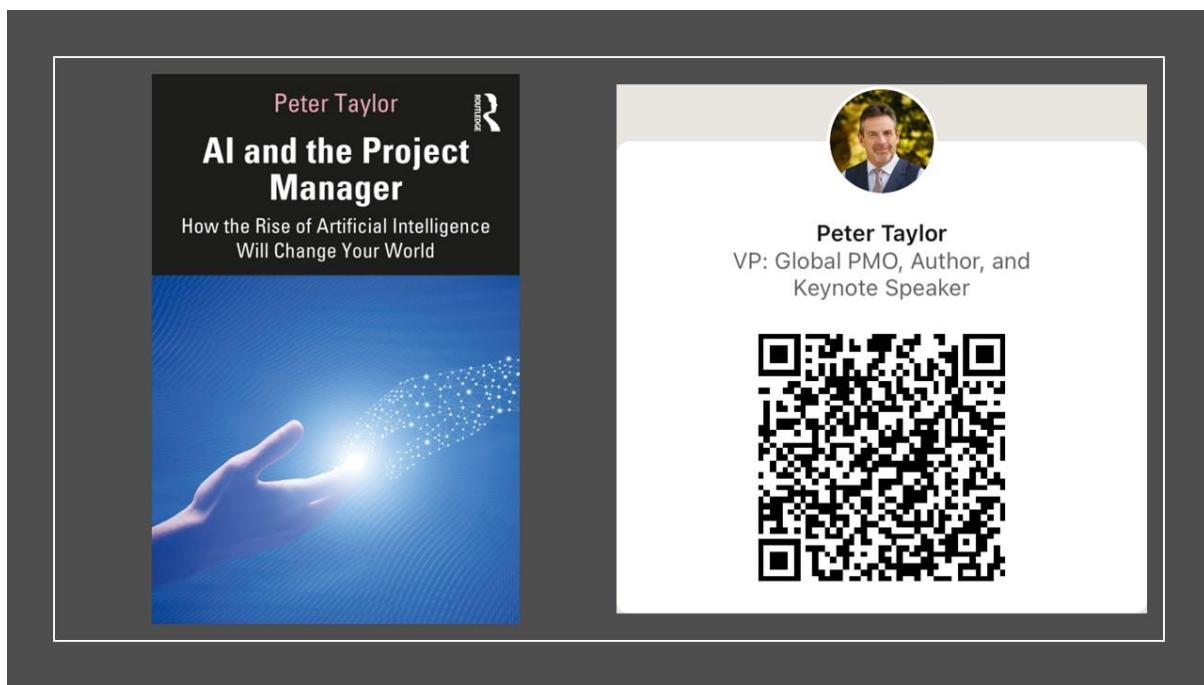
FIGURE 3 AI AND THE PROJECT MANAGER BOOK (2021)

AI and the Project Manager by Peter Taylor, published by Routledge, is an
accessible yet thought-provoking exploration of how artificial intelligence is
reshaping the discipline of project management.

It is a call to action for his profession.

The book begins by demystifying AI, explaining its evolution from early concepts and breakthroughs (like machine learning, natural language processing, and expert systems) through to the sophisticated, data-driven tools emerging today. Taylor situates this technological shift in a historical context, tracing how automation has gradually encroached on once-human tasks and highlighting the ways AI can now support or even replace many routine project activities, such as scheduling, reporting, risk prediction, and performance tracking.

Rather than portraying AI as a threat, Taylor makes the case that project managers have a tremendous opportunity to elevate their value by embracing these tools. He illustrates how AI can handle up to 80% of administrative and analytical workload, freeing human professionals to focus on leadership, stakeholder engagement, and fostering collaborative cultures that no algorithm can replicate at this time.

The book draws on real-world examples and emerging case studies to show AI-powered assistants spotting early signs of project trouble, recommending interventions, and matching the right talent to the right tasks, and being an amazing 'digital partner'.

Taylor balances optimism with caution, emphasising the pitfalls of biased data, lack of transparency, and overreliance on automation.

He challenges readers to consider whether traditional certifications and methods will remain relevant in a world where AI can learn and adapt faster than any manual process.

Ultimately, the book is both a guide and a reflection on the future of the profession, as well as a call for project managers to reimagine their role, not as task administrators but as human-centered leaders working in partnership with intelligent machines.